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FURTHER NOTES ON THE ROLE OF FOLKLORE IN HOMINOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: Dmitri Bayanov has pointed to folklore as an important source of information on possible relict hominoid creatures. He suggests that one may infer from such a creature in a tale the existence, present or former, of a real hominoid in the environment of the tale bearers. In fact, however, since the elements in a folktale serve largely an emotive or expressive function, a folktale is only useful in suggesting facts about relict hominoids just in so far as its hominoid creatures fail to show folkloric traits, exhibiting instead mundane details that have crept into the tale from the real world. Often, such fact-like details are relatively obvious, but for others a team of experts is needed to ensure proper evaluation. Two tales, one from the Ubykh of the Caucasus, the other from the Bella Coola of British Columbia, are briefly examined for both fact-like and fantastical elements regarding hominoid creatures.

Dmitri Bayanov, one of the world's foremost experts on "relict hominoids," has recently called attention to the value of folklore for the study of such relict forms (Bayanov 1982). This is only his latest restatement of a position previously put forth by him and his colleague, Igor Bourtsev (Bayanov and Bourtsev 1976). In short, their position is this: given the recurrence of hominoid figures in many of the world's folkloric traditions, these bodies of lore should be scrutinized more carefully by a host of experts to extract what, if any, information may lurk therein regarding relict men or man-like creatures.

A very simple and seemingly compelling example which they put forth is that of the figures of wolves and bears in folklore. Their conclusion is that such figures exist in a given lore precisely because such animals are part of the experience of the bearers of this lore. A similar inference must be made for hominoids. In part, I think that they are clearly right, and are performing a highly useful function in calling the attention of experts to a source of information which, in many (if not most) cases, may be the only source of information on relict hominoids in a particular area. On the other hand, their example of the wolves and bears of folklore is, I feel, misleading. One needs to look very carefully at exactly what types of information folklore can provide regarding matters of the real world and the creatures in it.

First, put quite simply, there are many figures that are frequently found throughout the world's folklore which no one would assume directly refer to a counterpart in the real world. Thus, one finds witches and sorcerers, demons and ogres, angels and good fairies. The list could be quite long.

Some of these figures, such as those of witches, sorcerers, and ogres, may reflect deep seated fears, perhaps arising during childhood, as in our own lore, or, in some cases, active daily concerns on the part of more "primitive" peoples. Thus, a witch may stand for the fear and revulsion a child feels toward a particularly unfortunate old woman that he may have met. Many "primitive" cultures call strangers "demons" or "devils." For such peoples, strangers actually are demons in that they violate the customs of the tribe, customs used to define humanness in the face of inhumanity. The racial slurs and epithets of our own time are dim reflections of such earlier loathings.

In short, a monster with man-like properties need not suggest that the lore in which it appears in some way bears testimony to the existence, present or former, of a relict hominoid in the environment of the lore-bearers. In certain cases, as with "primitive" peoples, demons, ogres, etc. may actually exist as perceptual categories into which certain peoples are placed, but such existence is of interest to the student of culture, not to the student of relict hominoids. Roughly speaking, folklore is expressive, not assertive. It depicts the feelings and reactions of a people to a multitude of things in their world. Such lore, be it the heritage of a "primitive" or a "sophisticated" people, does not come with an index listing the things in the world to which specific folkloric figures stand as emotional expressions. For example, when we find tales containing wolves, we infer that wolves are, or were, part of the fauna with which the tale tellers must have dealt. We do so because we all know, from firsthand experience, that wolves are real animals. Even if the wolf talks and carries on a wily dialogue with Little Red Riding Hood, we are not surprised because we realize that this is part of the expressive, narrative role of folklore. Thus, folklore represents a mode of expression in which fact and feeling, animal and man, animate and inanimate, nature and society, are all made to assume *dramatis personae* so as to take part in the narrative. As characters on a stage, the creatures, people, and elements of the world do not fall into the categories that we ("sophisticated" peoples) have come to feel reflect the objective world. They may bear traces of their objective properties, but as *dramatis personae* they carry non-natural (to us) features and traits, aspects directly related to the feelings and fears of the people bearing the lore.

Given this emotive and expressive aspect of folklore, one may feel that no useful information may be obtained from tradition. Perhaps we should simply ignore the mass of material on the Sasquatch that Suttles has listed (1972, 1980). In short, this seems to be exactly what many investigators have done. Both Suttles and Bayanov suspect that this is just the reason that so little of the lore on relict hominoids has found its way into enthnographic accounts and compilations. In my own case, working as a linguist, I did not know what to do when I came upon material dealing with a montane forest

man, as he is called in Circassian, and if it had not been for the purely fortuitous fact that a conference on human-like "monsters" was held a few years after I had come upon this account, I might never have published my own paper on the topic (Colarusso 1980).

However, despite its fundamentally expressive form, folklore does offer a source, sometimes the only one, for interesting information about a people's world, and it should be recorded and scrutinized not merely for its literary value, but also for its factual content, however masked that may be. Such scrutiny is done simply by looking for non-emotive factors in the tale. Such fact-like elements will be there not because they in some way serve the basic function of the tale, but because they have leaked in, so to say, from the world of brute fact, albeit filtered through the perceptual sieve of the culture involved. I shall now give a simple example of a fact-like hominoid account and an emotive hominoid account taken from the Caucasus.

The Ubykh are a people, now living in Turkey, who formerly lived on the east coast of the Black Sea, up against the Caucasus Mountains, with their kinsmen the Abkhazians to the south and the Circassians to the north. Their language is on the verge of extinction, and consequently has been the object of intensive efforts to record it during most of this century. By chance, one of the tales recorded contains accounts of both a fact-like hominoid and an emotive one (Dumézil and Namitok 1955: 30–33). A hunter goes up into the mountains, slays a deer, and prepares to cook it over his campfire. After placing his food on the fire, he hears a loud cry from the depths of the forest. Climbing into a nearby tree for safety, and not forgetting to take his food with him, the hunter nevertheless leaves behind his shaggy wool cloak, which he has draped over a tree. To his great shock and fear, a wild man emerges from the forest. This being is said only to be covered all over with hair. Nothing else is said by way of description. This wild man pounces upon the cloak of the hunter, at which point the hunter fires his pistol at the wild man. Whether or not he wounds the thing, its pelt catches fire and it runs off into the forest from whence it came.

There are a number of presumptive facts that one can extract from this account. First, there are hair covered man-like hominoids that live in the deep forest of the Caucasus, or lived there until recently. They are attracted by either the light of a campfire or the smell of cooking meat. They announce their approach by screaming loudly. Perhaps some territorial behavior is involved. They engage in actual combat. The wild man seems to have mistaken the shaggy cloak of the hunter for either a man in a cloak, or, more interestingly, for another wild man. In the latter case, this would imply that wild men use fire and cook meat.

The reaction of the hunter is not that of a hero, but merely of a man badly frightened. Sensibly, he climbs a tree for safety. He does not exhibit masterful marksmanship, but, in fear, sets off his pistol, perhaps missing or merely

wounding the wild man. The wild man seems to have caught fire from the campfire, and this case of a badly singed pelt, quite naturally, drives him off back into the forest. In short, both the hunter and the wild man act quite naturally, exhibiting aggression and fear in a manner conconant with a rare but real encounter. This account is only slightly more dramatic than that of the wild man to be found in the recently translated novel of the Abkhazian writer, Fazil Iskander (1983: 31). In this account, a forest woman jumps out of a thicket up in the mountains, runs past the Abkhazian hero, Sandro, and disappears into a rhododendron thicket before he can catch her. She is said only to have knee length hair, and to be beating her forehead (she at least has one!) in what appears to be lamentation. In Sandro, Iskander is trying to present not merely a heroic and satiric figure, but also an apotheosis of the beauties and lore of Abkhazian culture (*ibid.*: vii–viii). Sandro's encounter sounds like an anecdote that Iskander must have heard back in his native Abkhazia.

Such accounts are similar to the Circassian one of men trading with the wild men (Colarusso 1980: 257–58). My own Circassian informant first heard of the "montane forest man" when his father was teaching him hunting techniques (*ibid.*: 256–57). All this points to a near-man, perhaps a Neanderthal or another recent "sub-sapiens," or perhaps an early modern man, or even a relict *Homo erectus*. In a biological sense, the Caucasian wild man is quite mundane. This biological plausibility contrasts sharply with the emotive hominoid of Caucasian lore.

In the same story, the Ubykh hunter, once having driven off the wild man (and once the story teller presumably has his audience's complete attention following this hair-raiser), wanders lost in the forest until he enters a great wide plain. There, he encounters a raging giant bound in stone. This is the famous image of the Caucasian bound giant, apparently the source for the Greek Prometheus legend (Olrick 1922: 133–290). While the wild man is called "montane forest man," the giant is simply called "ugly big one." He is characteristically one-eyed, carries a weapon (in the present story a hook-like implement), is bound to a stone or rocky summit of a mountain, and is set upon destroying mankind and the whole order of nature should he ever be set free. He is the last of a wicked race, chained for his evil doings, and determined to destroy the world in revenge for his fate at the hands of man. He is Doomsday incarnate. His anatomy is implausible. He is not hairy, merely one-eyed and huge. He carries a weapon, usually magical, with which he will destroy the world. By refusing to listen to the giant's pleas to be released, the hero exhibits his knowledge of and respect for the old beliefs. The second half of the tale thus bears religious overtones of pagan origin. It has little content from which one might extract information about a possible relict hominoid. In its content and function, it stands in stark contrast with the first part of the story.

The tale of the wild man at the campfire sounds like it could be a narrative of an actual encounter. If anything, it serves to frighten the listener and attract his attention. The tale of the giant would seem to relate old religious beliefs, perhaps ancient fears about the inclement elements so typical of the mountain summit. Clearly, the giant's wicked intent is strongly contrasted to the bounty and fertility found in the wide plain, full of fruit and livestock. Thus, the giant probably has no hominoid prototype at all except for his personification based along the lineaments of man himself.

The Ubykh tale offers a relatively clear cut contrast between emotive and fact-like hominoid accounts. There is an analogous Bella Coola tale from the coast of British Columbia (Davis and Saunders 1980: 192–99), concerning a Sasquatch (called a /puq'ws/ in Bella Coola, a Salishan language). In this tale, the same figure plays both a fact-like and emotive role. Two encounters are depicted. In the first, a man named Almtsi is digging for clams when he hears what he thinks are two Sasquatches digging nearby. He goes and spies two of them, one digging toward the water and the other carrying armfuls of clams back into the woods. After a bit, he decides to try and shoot one, but his gun fails to fire. The Sasquatches, however, hear the "click," and, apparently knowing it for the sound of a trigger, run off. In the second encounter, a couple with a child are sitting by the campfire near the shore. They hear loud deep noises in the forest, which they think are thunder. Then, what they take to be a man suddenly appears, but to their fright it proves to be a Sasquatch, and the man throws a firebrand into its face. While the Sasquatch is writhing in pain, the family makes good its escape. The head of this family is named Qaaklis.

The encounters of both Almtsi and Qaaklis with the Sasquatch are considered rare and unusual events, but they are both conspicuously lacking in emotive content, except for the fright of Qaaklis and his family. One might infer that this tale relates noteworthy encounters with some sort of relict hominoid. This hominoid dwells in the forest, but will come down to the water. In Almtsi's case, the Sasquatches exhibit cooperative effort of a simple sort, as well as a taste for clams. In Qaaklis's encounter, it is not clear what the Sasquatch is after (perhaps it would like to eat the child, or perhaps steal their belongings, or drive them off its territory), but at least it exhibits no fear of fire. It slaps the trees, making a thunderlike sound as it does so. This the Bella Coola narrator explains as part of common knowledge about the habits of Sasquatches, and as his way of explaining an error on the part of Qaaklis and his wife, who took it as thunder. Bayanov (1982: 47) mentions tree-striking as a Sasquatch feature, and offers the ingenious interpretation that this may be the creature's way of knocking down dead trees so that it can feed upon the larvae therein.

This last feature of tree-slapping is an excellent example of ambiguous or opaque data. To a folklorist with no training in primate behavior, such a feature might seem purely mythical, with little factual basis. To a hominologist, this feature seems to be an account of a straightforward feeding habit, albeit the Bella Coola narrator seems quite unaware of this possible interpretation. Clearly, as Bayanov urges, a host of experts should scrutinize such lore.

Other features in the Bella Coola account bear an emotive quality. Qaaklis and his family find, in the course of their escape, that the channel they have taken seems to be running shallow, so that they have to drag their canoe along. Almtsi's gun fails to fire. The significance of both happenings is not stated. The listener is left to infer some mystical or magical significance, should he or she so choose. These emotive features, however, may be explained. The gun simply failed to fire. Perhaps as he was near water Almtsi let the gun get wet. Qaaklis nearly grounds his canoe with his family and all his belonging on board. Though he should have been familiar with the channel, in his great fear he may have run afoul of some shallows in the dark. Nevertheless, the narrator has left open the *possibility* that the strange figures of the Sasquatches may have had some ill-defined role in causing these odd mischances. The narrator concludes the story by saying that these are unusual events.

Despite this eerie quality, the mischances have nothing about them that in any way interferes with the extraction of mundane information about a possible hominoid from the two encounters. No weird anatomical aspects are involved, such as a single eye. In fact, the tale is quite disappointing in providing very little information about the creatures, except that they may be mistaken for people, but in fact are beasts (Davis and Saunders 1980: 196). In fact the creatures are not even considered half-men or some such, but simply are taken as animals. No strange lasting effects are experienced by the men. The encounters are eerie and associated with odd happenings, but these are explicable. This story stands in stark contrast with, for example, another one in Davis and Saunders (1980: 247–51), in which a man who habitually wanders about the woods at night meets "Death." The man faints, and is revived by a "spirit" who gives him a magical implement that can be used to revive the dead. Back in his village, the hero does just that and becomes a famous shaman. I would not waste my time looking for hominoid creatures in this story. Against this shaman's tale, the first story takes on a very mundane aspect.

I would assert the following about the usefulness of folklore in the study of relict hominoids. In so far as a tale lacks mystical, numinous, magical features, in short, in so far as it contains features that do not appear to serve an emotive, expressive function, then these features may be scrutinized for possible data regarding relict hominoids. Such scrutiny is worthwhile even if a portion of the story lapses into a highly magical tone. One is looking for noise from the real world that has found its way into an otherwise fantastical

drama. Such scrutiny should be conducted by numerous experts with wide-ranging knowledge, preferably by a linguist to ensure that the words of the tale are glossed accurately; by a folklorist so that elements with typically emotive function may be identified with a high degree of probability; by a cultural anthropologist who knows the patterns of the society involved, so that features that might seem peculiar to an investigator, but are really just aspects of the culture at hand, may be identified; and finally, by a primatologist, so that traits typical of (or possibly related to) hominoid behavior may be singled out and not taken for a residue of fantastical features, such as may be the case with tree knocking.

In effect, the analysis of a tale proceeds from prior knowledge brought to bear upon it from a wide spectrum of experts. In this sense, the analysis is basically like that of inferring a wolf in the world from a wolf in a tale. It is more complex, however, in that the traits belonging to a wolf in the real world are fairly well known to everyone, whereas the traits of any putative surviving hominoids must be inferred from those of their near kindred, ourselves (presumably), the great apes, and primates in general. One must err on the side of caution in such an undertaking, and not seek a Sasquatch behind every ogre, no matter how often ogres are encountered in the world of folklore.

Surely many more creatures lurk in the forests of the mind than in the forests of the real world.

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